

Easter Day - the Resurrection of the Lord

8th April 2012

Acts 10: 34-43, Psalm 118: 1 - 2, 14 – 24, Colossians 3: 1-4, Matthew28:1-10

In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Christ is Risen, and we have come together to celebrate the mystery of Easter. Some have spent Lent and Holy Week preparing ourselves for today and so now we are here what do we find, or maybe what do we expect to encounter? Let's look again at this central mystery of our faith as we seek to make sense of the whole story and so deepen our appreciation of Easter.

I've drawn on four theologians to help with our exploration. The first was the daughter of Major John Humphreys; Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander was born in April 1818 and was a songwriter and poet. Another songwriter and poet whose father, Alfred, named him after the then prime minister Winston Churchill; John Winston Lennon reached an audience that might well have surpassed that of Cecil Francis Alexander. The third is Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta; she primarily studied at the Convent of the Sacred Heart and was named one of the most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine; she's better known as Lady Gaga. And my fourth reference point is a Christian who is close to my heart.

The first thing to notice is that these four are progressively more current, their births spanning the years from 1818 to the 1980's; they therefore come from generationally different worlds and different worldviews from one another. It is also worth noting that some of their insights were not previously available; the worldview of one generation cannot even imagine what the generations to come will see. We live in the context of creation unfolding; those who think (or were taught) that God created the world have been misled, for it is apparent that creation is very much a present tense activity and not a past tense event.

Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander wrote the hymn "There is a Green Hill Far Away", it was written in 1848, for the collection she published in her book *Hymns for Little Children*.
Many of us are familiar with this Easter carol:

There is a green hill far away,
Outside a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.

This Easter hymn tells the gospel story and echoes an orthodox theology that tells us that Christ died for us. It is however, important to appreciate that this hymn was published in a book called

Hymns for Little Children and that is very much where it belongs and where it serves a valuable role. The orthodox telling of the Easter story and its reduction to an act within history that was performed by a superstar Jesus is valuable for *Little Children* just as the story of Santa Claus provides a delightful story and valuable life lesson for children.

John Winston Lennon wrote another song asking us to consider another possibility that might take us beyond thelLittle children's version of Easter:

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today

Here we are invited to leave the orthodox view behind, and see that the Easter story might have meaning in a cosmology that is not limited by the understanding of those who thought the earth was flat. The interpretation that the Easter story narrates a transaction between God, Christ and some chosen believers, that it was an event that changed the world once and for all is called into question each and every time we seek to embrace the desire to more fully follow in the teachings of Christ. And already this glimpse of understanding seems evident in the early letter to the Colossians we heard this morning:
So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

The *things that are above* are no longer geographically located; rather it is within that we need to look and so we are called to *set our minds on things that are above*, the orientation of life that is set toward higher things. And John Lennon has summed this up so well with the title of his song *"Imagine"*.

And that's what we might do this Easter. Imagine the depth of truth that this story seeks to reveal, without the encumbrance of our world view; we must look beyond what we see and open ourselves to that which can be imagined. Some of the early church fathers saw beyond the story, and glimpsed the truth of being fully human and fully divine, but others, without imagination could only see the star of the story and so contained or limited the insight to that which was within their own field of vision.

And so we turn to our next theologian, Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, Lady Gaga. Two of her songs encourage us into the place of Easter; the first is *"The Edge Of Glory"* and that is exactly the place of the cross and also the place of the tomb. Both are places of dying, and she sings them into the present moment. The song is a love song, that captures the moment between potential and realisation:

I'm on the edge of glory, and I'm hanging on a moment of truth

As we contemplated the last words of Christ from the cross, the moment of truth became evident between "*My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me*" and "*I Thirst*". A realisation that God is not out there waiting to rescue, and a movement toward the Divine life within, "I Thirst". The thirst on the cross is a thirst for fullness of Life, for a oneness with God and so too with all.

Lady Gaga repeats the chorus over and over

I'm on the edge of glory, and I'm hanging on a moment of truth
I'm on the edge of glory, and I'm hanging on a moment with you

The song is about passion and it is sung with passion, and so it is a song of Easter and of 'Eastering', for Easter itself opens our eyes to the very essence of love, the edge of glory. To find the same moment for ourselves we need to leave behind the familiar Easter Story and imagine the movements of the story in the present, no heaven above, no hell below, but here and now knowing ourselves hanging, on a moment of truth, on the very edge of glory.

The second song, invites us to change the focus of the Easter story; the song *"Born This Way"* begins with;

My mama told me when I was young
We are all born superstars

Now hear again the words from the letter to the Colossians: *your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.*

Or in Lady Gaga's language, *We are all born superstars*, and it is us, each and every one of us, who are the focus of the Easter story – today is our day! The song continues with more theology:

"There's nothing wrong with loving who you are"
She said, "'Cause he made you perfect, babe"

So we can forget 'original sin' and get on with seeking the perfection that is our creation, made in the image of God, and a reflection of Christ. It is a theology she repeats:

I'm beautiful in my way
'Cause God makes no mistakes

And in case we miss the theological implications she changes languages to her native tongue: *Mi amore vole fe,* which translates as "Love needs faith". The song "Born this Way" might well be for us "Born this Day", for in our encounter with Easter we encounter an opportunity of birth: resurrection is a reality to be found when we die to that which is bounded by this world and imagine ourselves into the eternity that is our fullest and perfect truth.

Toward the end of the song she echoes John Lennon:

Don't be a drag, just be a queen
Whether you're broke or evergreen
You're black, white, beige, chola descent
You're Lebanese, you're orient

Whether life's disabilities
Left you outcast, bullied, or teased
Rejoice and love yourself today
'cause baby you were born this way.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace

Both these songs sing of the revelation of Easter as a reality for all. This is not a Christian event, unless we seek to restrict it to Christ and claim ownership over him. If we see Easter or can imagine Easter as a revelation of Love, and an illustration of love's dynamic process, a passion that involves dying and rising, then we too will see it as a revelation for all.

And my final theologian, a Christian, and like the first, a child of another Humphris…. When my son came to visit the week before Easter he wore a tee-shirt with these words:

I think... Therefore I am... An Atheist

On Good Friday we contemplated the broken Christ in his mother's arms, as captured in the famous Pieta of Michelangelo. And we listened to Janice sing "She carries me". The words of the song for us spoke of Mary holding the Christ who had been taken off the cross:

"She is a boat, she is a light

And so she is the Church. We too are asked to carry the broken Christ, and maybe to see that in the present that translates to the Church, 'the body of Christ'.

A thinking atheist questions that which the Church holds as sacred, its doctrines, dogmas, creeds and beliefs. The church is not immune from the dying and rising of Easter, and yet forever seems to avoid that very process. I hold much in common with the thinking atheist, for I too question the theological orientation of Major Humphreys' daughter when it is held by adults and by the Church as more than a *Hymn for Little Children.*

Our Good Friday contemplation finished with:

She is the first, she is the last
She is the future and the past,
Mother of all, of earth and sky
She carries me to the other side,
She carries me to the other side..."

Christ lay in the arms of Mary, she carried him.. The same is now given into our arms. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. Mary, *She is the first, she is the last,* and so too are we, for tomorrow is forever in our hands.

The Easter story points us toward new life and to a new way of living, a passion for life and for giving life to all. May we each this Easter, carry the promise that is entrusted to us and give it as a gift of life to others.

The Lord be with you
Peter Humphris